



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

For Release APRIL 1, 1958

SECRETARY SEATON RECOMMENDS STRENGTHENING FISH AND WILDLIFE LEGISLATION

Amendments to the Coordination Act which would clearly establish the authority of project construction agencies to provide for the enhancement of fish and wildlife resources as an integral part of Federal water development projects were recommended to the Congress today by Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton.

The amendments are designed to provide for the better conservation of valuable commercial fishery resources, now threatened by numerous coastal and estuarine developments, as well as sport fish and wildlife resources affected by river basin development.

Secretary Seaton's proposals were in the form of a revised draft of Senate Bill 2496, an Interior-approved bill introduced last year and currently pending before the Senate Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce.

Secretary Seaton made the proposal in a letter sent today to the Chairman of the Committee, Senator Warren G. Magnuson of Washington. The letter is a legislative report on S. 2496, introduced by Senator Arthur V. Watkins of Utah. A similar report is being sent to Congressman Herbert C. Bonner, Chairman of the House Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries, which is considering several House bills identical to S. 2496.

The Secretary stated that the proposed substitute for S. 2496 is a "strengthened and improved version over the draft the Department of the Interior prepared last year" and added that "some changes were made to assure that this proposal will be workable when applied to the water development programs of all Departments."

The preliminary draft was submitted in 1957 to the Governors of all 48 States, all of whom endorsed the Department's earlier version. The Departments of Agriculture, the Army, and Commerce and the Federal Power Commission have concurred in the revision just submitted to the Senate Committee, the Secretary added.

The Coordination Act in its present form was passed in 1946 and is the basis for Federal-State cooperation in protecting and developing fish and wildlife resources on federally financed or sponsored water projects. Secretary Seaton's proposals are based upon experience gained in the past decade.

In providing more effective integration of fish and wildlife conservation with Federal water-resource programs the amendments will--

Grant authority for the withdrawal of public lands for fishing purposes and for access to fishing and hunting areas. The present law provides only for withdrawal of hunting areas;

Establish procedures to apply to all types of projects undertaken by any Federal agency or any other agency under Federal license or permit. This would clarify its application to dredging and navigation projects and to certain non-Federal projects, undertaken under permit, to which the present act does not apply at all;

Provide definitely for the planning by States and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service for the enhancement and improvement of fish and wildlife resources as well as for the prevention of damage to such resources on Federal water projects;

Specifically require that reports submitted to Congress by a water construction agency include an estimation of the probable effects of the project on fish and wildlife resources;

Provide the means by which Federal water construction agencies, with the approval of the Congress, may acquire project lands for fish and wildlife purposes;

Authorize Federal agencies to include wildlife conservation measures, for both mitigation and enhancement on previously authorized projects, provided they are not substantially completed and provided that the measures are compatible with the authorized project purpose;

Simplify the procedures under which Federal project lands that are found to be valuable for the national migratory bird program can be assigned to State fish and game departments for management;

Amend the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act to provide for the application of the principles of the Coordination Act to the small watershed program while leaving the full control of the program with local groups and with the Secretary of Agriculture.

x x x